IN THE CLAIMS:

Replace all previous versions of the claims with the version set forth below.

Claims 1-47 were canceled.

48. (Currently Amended) A device for separating impurities from the lubricating oil of an internal combustion engine, said device comprising a filter element at its bottom and, on top of said filter element, a centrifuge with a rotor drivable by means of lubricating oil flowing therethrough, wherein said filter element and said centrifuge are arranged, one above the other, in a common two-piece housing that is closed during operation of the device and comprises a removable upper screw cap and a stationary lower housing part, wherein a removable intermediate cap is arranged in the housing between said filter element and said centrifuge, and wherein said centrifuge, said intermediate cap and said filter element can be removed from the housing while the latter is in its open state, wherein only the screw cap and the intermediate cap comprise detachable connection members that can be brought in engagement with each other and are arranged to transmit at least one of axial tractive forces and axial tractive and compressive forces between each other, and relative to each other, the intermediate cap and the filter element are unconnected component parts of the device, and the intermediate cap and the filter element are constructed free of connection elements that would transmit tractive forces between the intermediate cap and the filter element.

49. (Currently Amended) A device according to claim 48, wherein by rotating the screw cap in its loosening rotational direction in relation to the intermediate cap, the connection members are brought in engagement with each other and, by rotating the screw cap in its tightening rotational direction in relation to the intermediate cap, the ~~connections~~ connection members are brought out of engagement with each other.

50. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 48, wherein the connection members connecting the screw cap and the intermediate cap that are formed as rotary connection means are in the form of one of a bayonet lock and a short-length thread.

51. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 49, wherein the intermediate cap has the shape of a bell and comprises at its outer perimeter axially extending ribs, each of which is provided with at least one of a broadening and aperture pointing in circumferential direction and is designed as a first of the connection members and the screw cap comprises at its lower edge hooks or noses that are pointing in a loosening rotational direction and are provided as a second of the connection members and can be brought in engagement with the first connection member by rotating the screw cap in its loosening rotational direction in relation to the intermediate cap and can be brought out of engagement by rotating the screw cap in its tightening rotational direction in relation to the intermediate cap.

52. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 51, wherein the ribs that comprise the first connection member also comprise stabilization and force diverting ribs for reinforcing the intermediate cap and for diverting onto the screw cap such forces that are caused by an oil pressure below the intermediate cap in the interior region of the housing.

53. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 49, wherein the intermediate cap has the shape of a bell and, in a radially outward direction, comprises at its upper side a plurality of axially extending wings that are pointing in upward direction and are spaced apart from each other in circumferential direction, wherein each of said wings is formed to have as connection means at least one of a broadening or aperture pointing in a circumferential direction and one recess pointing in a radially inward direction and that, at its lower edge, the screw cap comprises as connection means hooks or noses extending in one of its loosening rotational direction and in a radially inward direction, wherein said hooks or noses are arranged such that they will be brought in engagement with the connection means of the intermediate cap by rotating the screw cap in its loosening rotational direction in relation to the intermediate cap and is arranged such that they will be brought out of engagement with the connection means of

the intermediate cap by rotating the screw cap in its tightening rotational direction in relation to the intermediate cap.

54. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 53, wherein the connection member of the screw cap on the one hand and the wings with the connection member of the intermediate cap on the other hand are arranged and designed such that, with the intermediate cap being already inserted in the housing, they overlap each other in axial direction when the screw cap is placed onto the stationary housing part before the thread engagement thereof.

55. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 53, wherein the wings are, at their radially outer end, provided with a guide contour that fits in the interior region of the screw cap with a motional play.

56. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 53, wherein a step is provided at or next to each of the wings, said step projecting in a radially outward direction and forming the basis on which a section of the lower edge of the screw cap is supported when the latter is in the tightened state.

57. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 56, wherein each of the steps, at least in part, comprise an edge projecting in an upward direction at its end pointing in the loosening rotational direction of the screw cap.

58. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 57, wherein one of a continuous and broken sliding ramp is provided for the lower edge of the screw cap, said sliding ramp being arranged at the level of said edge and, as seen in the tightening rotational direction of the screw cap, in front of each of the steps at the intermediate cap that comprise at least one edge.

59. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 53, wherein the wings are one of connected to each other via a continuous circumferential collar and are joined to form a continuous circumferential collar.

60. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 51, wherein one of the first of the connections members on the one hand and the second of the connection members on the other hand are formed to have one of a slope or step at their surfaces engaging each other, said slope or step securing the engaged position.

61. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 48, wherein the screw cap is formed to have strengthening ribs at its inner perimeter, at least in the region of its connection member.

62. (Canceled)

63. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 48, wherein at least one of the screw cap and the intermediate cap are formed as single-piece injection-molded plastic parts.

64. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 48, wherein at least one of the screw cap and the intermediate cap are each single-piece die light metal castings.

65. (Currently Amended) A device for separating impurities from the lubricating oil of an internal combustion engine, said device comprising a filter element at its bottom and, on top of said filter element, a centrifuge with a rotor drivable by means of lubricating oil flowing therethrough, wherein said filter element and said centrifuge are arranged, one above the other, in a common two-piece housing that is closed during operation of the device and comprises a removable upper screw cap and a stationary lower housing part, wherein a removable intermediate cap is arranged in the housing between said filter element and said centrifuge, and wherein said centrifuge, said intermediate cap and said filter element can be removed from the

housing while the latter is in its open state, wherein only the screw cap and the intermediate cap comprise detachable connection members that can be brought in engagement with each other and are arranged to transmit at least one of axial tractive forces and axial tractive and compressive forces between each other, and relative to each other, the intermediate cap and the filter element are unconnected component parts of the device, ~~according to claim 48, wherein~~

the device ~~is designed~~being provided with a ~~broken~~ perforated centrifuge bottom that forms a part of the intermediate cap and permits lubricating oil coming out of the rotor to flow therethrough,

the centrifuge bottom ~~comprises~~ comprising in its center a holding for one of a lower pivot bearing and a lower axle end of the rotor, and

the centrifuge bottom ~~is designed~~being provided at its outer perimeter and at least in its upper part with an annular external thread that is arranged to be screwed into a mating internal thread in the interior region of the screw cap.

66. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 65, wherein the centrifuge bottom and the intermediate cap are formed integrally with each other.

67. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 65, wherein the centrifuge bottom and the intermediate cap are each formed as a separate component which are brought in at least one of an axially extending sealing plug and screwed connection which transmits at least one of axial tractive forces and axial tractive and compressive forces.

68. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 67, wherein an adapter piece that is hollow in its axial direction is inserted between the centrifuge bottom and the intermediate cap, the lower part of said adapter piece centrally engaging the intermediate cap and the upper part of said adapter piece centrally engaging the centrifuge bottom, wherein the outer perimeter of the adapter piece has a spherical contour in one of its upper and lower parts, permitting rotation of the adapter piece in relation to the axial direction to a limited extent.

69. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 67, wherein the adapter piece comprises at its outer perimeter one of a projecting band and collar between its lower part and its upper part.

70. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 68, wherein the adapter piece comprises in its lower part a plurality of axially extending flexible locking arms with locking noses which permit engaging insertion of the adapter piece in an oil through opening in the intermediate cap.

71. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 65, wherein, to permit connection of the screw cap and the lower housing part to each other in a detachable manner, the screw cap is designed with one of an external thread and an internal thread and the lower housing part with the other of a mating internal thread and a mating external thread.

72. (Previously Presented) A device according to anyone of claim 65, wherein the centrifuge bottom comprises a plurality of arms that extend in a radial direction from the holding to its outer perimeter comprising the external thread and which are spaced apart from each other in circumferential direction.

73. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 72, wherein the arms are flat, with their flat planes each being arranged in a radial and an axial direction.

74. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 65, wherein the intermediate cap is plugged in the lower part of the housing with an intermediate layer of one of a radially and axially acting seal being placed therebetween.

75. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 65, wherein, with the housing closed, the intermediate cap is, at its outer perimeter, supported in an axial direction on the upper side of a step in the inner perimeter of the lower housing part.

76. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 65, wherein the centrifuge, the centrifuge bottom, the intermediate cap and the screw cap form a pre-assembled unit which can be screwed to the lower housing part.

77. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 65, wherein the screwed connection between the screw cap and the stationary housing part and the screwed connection between the screw cap and the centrifuge bottom comprise equidirectional threads.

78. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 65, wherein the screwed connection between the screw cap and the stationary housing part and the screwed connection between the screw cap and the centrifuge bottom comprise threads of opposite sense.

79. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 77, wherein the screwed connection between the screw cap and the centrifuge bottom has a loosening torque that exceeds the loosening torque of the screwed connection between the screw cap and the stationary housing part.

80. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 77, wherein the screwed connection between the screw cap and the centrifuge bottom has a loosening torque that exceeds the loosening torque between the intermediate cap and the stationary housing part.

81. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 65, wherein a detachable anti-loosening device is provided at least for the screwed connection between the screw cap and the centrifuge bottom.

82. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 65, wherein the intermediate cap and the filter element, as seen in relation to each other, are non-connected component parts of the device without any connection means.

83. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 65, wherein the intermediate cap and the filter element comprise detachable second connection members arranged to transmit axial tractive forces and to be brought in engagement with each other.

84. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 83, wherein the second connection member comprises an arrangement providing a locking connection.

85. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 83, wherein the second connection member comprises an arrangement providing one of a screwed connection, a bayonet-type connection and a rotary connection.

86. (Previously Presented) A device according to claim 65, wherein the housing, the centrifuge bottom, the intermediate cap and the adapter piece are parts manufactured in an injection-molding process of one of plastic and light metal.

87. (Canceled)

88. (Currently Amended) A housing assembly for a device for separating impurities from the lubricating oil of an internal combustion engine which device includes a filter element at a bottom of said device and a centrifuge with a rotor drivable by means of lubricating oil flowing therethrough arranged on top of said filter element, comprising:

a common two-piece housing, arranged to receive said filter element and said centrifuge positioned one above the other, which is closed during operation of said device,

said housing including a removable upper screw cap and a stationary lower housing part, and

a removable intermediate cap arranged in said housing between said filter element and said centrifuge,

said centrifuge, said intermediate cap and said filter element being removable from said housing while said housing is in an open state, and

only said screw cap and said intermediate cap comprising detachable connection members engageable with each other and being arranged to transmit at least one of axial tractive forces and axial tractive and compressive forces between each other,

relative to each other, said intermediate cap and said filter element being unconnected component parts of the device, and the intermediate cap and the filter element being constructed free of connection elements that would transmit tractive forces between the intermediate cap and the filter element.

89. (New) A device according to claim 65, wherein by rotating the screw cap in its loosening rotational direction in relation to the intermediate cap, the connection members are brought in engagement with each other and, by rotating the screw cap in its tightening rotational direction in relation to the intermediate cap, the connection members are brought out of engagement with each other.